

THE BUILDERS OF THE JEFFERS MEMORIAL MOUND – WERE THEY THE ADENA OR HOPEWELL PEOPLE?

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A procession of antiquarian archaeologists, their contemporary brethren and some researchers have described the Vining/Smith/ Jeffers/ Worthington Indian Mound, (33Fr3), (Figure 1), as one of the northernmost Ohio mounds of the Middle Woodland Period Hopewell people. The photo shows the mound now known as the Jeffers Memorial Mound and nearby farm buildings in 1920 when owned by descendants of the Vining family, the original developers of the farmstead.

The mound was described by early researcher and surveyor, Charles Whittlesey, as a large truncated tumulus, 20 feet in height, 192 feet in diameter at the base and 76 feet in diameter at the summit. The sizable, scrupulously preserved, mound is located in the northern Columbus suburb of Worthington, off State Route 315. The Hopewell determination is largely based on a formerly associated rectangular earthwork enclosure, a likely Hopewell house pattern found near the base of the mound, and evidence of domestic activity close to the mound the latter from 1978-79 and 1985 fieldwork projects. The house, probably a temporary structure, revealed a double post mold pattern similar to Hopewell houses excavated in Ross County, Ohio. These recent research projects conducted by The Ohio State University and Ohio Historical Society have largely ignored the Jeffers Mound itself. It should be noted the 1970's and 1980's excavations, all near the mound base, failed to produce the expected array of Hopewell cultural materials. In fact the flint artifacts found during these projects were mostly unidentifiable salvaged flint tools and broken points from several cultural periods suggesting brief multicultural intrusions at the site.

The object of this article is to establish a better understanding of the people who might have built the Jeffers Mound. Whether my opinions are worthy of serious consideration will be up to the reader. The thoughts proposed are at least food for thought and may provide a stimulus for further research in light of what the author feels are the previous chroniclers' largely inferential assumptions about the mound's origin.

My first clue about the Jeffers mound's origin is derived from its peculiar position in relation to earthworks that once intersected it. The strange juxtaposition of the earthworks suggests an alteration was needed when the adjacent earthwork was constructed. More about this later in this essay.

A second clue is provided by the mound's current configuration, particularly its mostly flat upper surface. This was probably the result of artificial leveling when the mound

was first explored in a cursory manner by excavating a vertical shaft through its center. The mound may have been more conical in form prior to this alteration. Its former conical form could indicate its true identity.

Another mostly inferential clue about the original builders is provided by the reassessment of the neighboring Melvin Phillips Mound Group. This site was investigated by the Ohio Historical Society in 1964. The primary investigator uncharacteristically determined the two conical Phillips mounds were Hopewell despite the recovery of mostly diagnostic Early Woodland Period Adena artifacts in the mound fill (Figure 2). The Phillips tumuli were located north of Dublin-Granville Road (State Route 161) and slightly over 2000 feet directly west of the Jeffers Mound. They were situated in association with the same dominant landform, the deep Linworth Run ravine, probably a valuable prehistoric water source that drains to the east into the nearby Olentangy River. Scattered post molds were observed at Phillips but were difficult to interpret from the field notes.

A very brief history of research at the Jeffers mound could provide additional valuable information about its origin. The first investigator at the site, Charles Whittlesey, in 1825, surveyed and identified the rectangular earthworks, several mounded earth circles and two mounds at the site. The earthworks averaged three feet in height and ten feet wide. Their overall measurements were 630 feet by 550 feet and they covered an area of about eight acres. Whittlesey's survey map (Figure 3) is reproduced from Squier and Davis's 1848 publication, *Ancient Monuments of the Mississippi Valley*. The reader will note the centrally located mound within the earthworks and at one side the Jeffers Mound intersected by the earthworks in a peculiar offset manner. The placement of the earthwork walls seem to indicate the mound was constructed earlier.

In 1866 a local resident, William Heath, sank a vertical shaft from the top center of the mound to its base. He then ran a tunnel in from the east side of the mound to meet the excavated shaft. To provide the necessary room for the central shaft excavation materials and allow the necessary working space, Heath would have partially leveled or flattened the mound's upper surface. This can be observed in an 1899 somewhat poor resolution profile view of the mound (Figure 4). Among Heath's mound finds were fragments of pottery and two skeletons "surrounded on all sides by multitudinous layers and coverings of decayed wood." The wooden grave cribbing materials provide another clue about the Jeffers Mound's

origin. Wooden crib lined graves are a common feature in Early Woodland Adena mounds although wooden grave components to a lesser degree are also sometimes found at Middle Woodland Hopewell sites.

The reader will notice the un-named mound in the middle of the earthwork pattern in Whittlesey's diagram. This was described as a mostly conical mound about 58 feet in diameter. It was examined and obliterated by four area residents in 1897. Reportedly, human and animal bones, ashes, charcoal and unidentified archaeological specimens were recovered, their excavations providing little help in identifying its builders. This mound was perhaps intended to be the featured Hopewell cemetery structure within the earthworks, being positioned approximately at the center of the surrounding earthworks, being positioned approximately at the center of the surrounding earthen walls. On the other hand the Jeffers Mound is obviously placed with little regard to its position within the complex of mounded features. This represents a deviation from the normally balanced and uniformly formatted Hopewell monuments. My research into comparable anomalies in Ohio's prehistoric earthworks has not produced another example of a mound intersected by an offset earthwork feature. For example, there are several instances of mounds meeting earthwork walls in Butler County Ohio but most are located at the corners of earthwork pattern. All of this tends to confirm the Jeffers Mound was probably constructed prior to the encroaching Worthington earthworks and therefore could be an Early Woodland Adena mound.

It is also noteworthy that the Jeffers Mound is located in a region dominated by Early Woodland Adena mounds, many on similar central Ohio landscapes. Another remaining area Adena mound, the remnant Coe Mound, rests on a similar less elevated landform about a mile directly south of the Jeffers Mound.

Another, perhaps only anecdotal, piece of evidence was provided by the 1978-79 joint Ohio State University, Ohio Historical Society excavations that revealed a rectangular shaped "Hopewell dwelling" near the base of the Jeffers Mound. In Field Supervisor Suzanne Langlois's summary report she stated that in addition to lithic materials, a small obsidian waste flake and a few drilled crinoid stems, a mostly flat "triangular piece of sandstone was recovered and probably used as a whetstone." The latter artifact is one of the flattened triangular and rectangular sandstone tools often attributed to the Adena.

In 1985 Richard Yerkes of The Ohio State

University excavated portions of the site immediately east and northeast of the Jeffers Mound. A quote from his summary report indicates his hesitation about labeling the Worthington/Jeffers Site an exclusive Hopewell enclave. "The artifacts and radio-carbon dates analyzed so far suggest that the site was periodically occupied from the Middle Archaic through the Late Woodland Periods."

It is somewhat ironic that most of the recent research at the Jeffers Mound site has not included the mound proper not even on a non-destructive sampling basis. Additional clues on its identity might be obtained by studying the designs and placement of the previously referenced mounded earth circles that were formerly present adjacent to the Worthington/Jeffers complex.

All of this potential evidence points to the conclusion that the Jeffers tumulus could well be an Early Woodland Adena Mound or perhaps even a transitional mound transcending the Early Woodland and Middle Woodland Periods.

Although not the focus of this treatise, the rectangular earthwork pattern deviation shown in Figure 1 at either side of the Jeffers Mound is worthy of further discussion. Its altered configuration might represent an important accommodation made by the Hopewell to establish the entry and departure points of participants at events inside the grounds enclosed by the earthworks. It could have been believed the offset earthwork openings at either side of the mound allowed visitors, at least superficially, to experience certain perceived powerful spiritual forces emanating from the mound. The deeply recessed opening at one side could have been the main entry point permitting those passing through to both witness the mound's dominance and hence power, and receive powerful influences from its entombed spirits. The deep offset entry required one to pass by the mound almost in its entirety thus receiving the maximum level of supplication. Spiritual influences in the mound could have been viewed as enriching and helping to fulfill individual

pleadings. The entry provided additional support for rituals conducted within the ceremonial grounds.

A current photo (Figure 5) of the Jeffers Mound in its winter garb is shown to illustrate its impressive size and if one can imagine even its ritual role. The shadowy photo has a vertical sun shadow seemingly rising out of the mound, perhaps a lifeline to the spirit world above the earth.

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References

- 1866 Columbus Morning Journal, October 1, 1866
- 1979 Langlois, Susan L., Field notes from investigations at The Jeffers Mound Site
- 1985 Yerkes, Richard W., Archaeological investigations at the Jeffers Memorial Mound, (33Fr3), Worthington, Ohio, (Paper presented at the 1985 Midwest Archaeological Conference)



Figure 1 (Gehlbach) 1920 view of the Jeffers Mound & farm buildings.

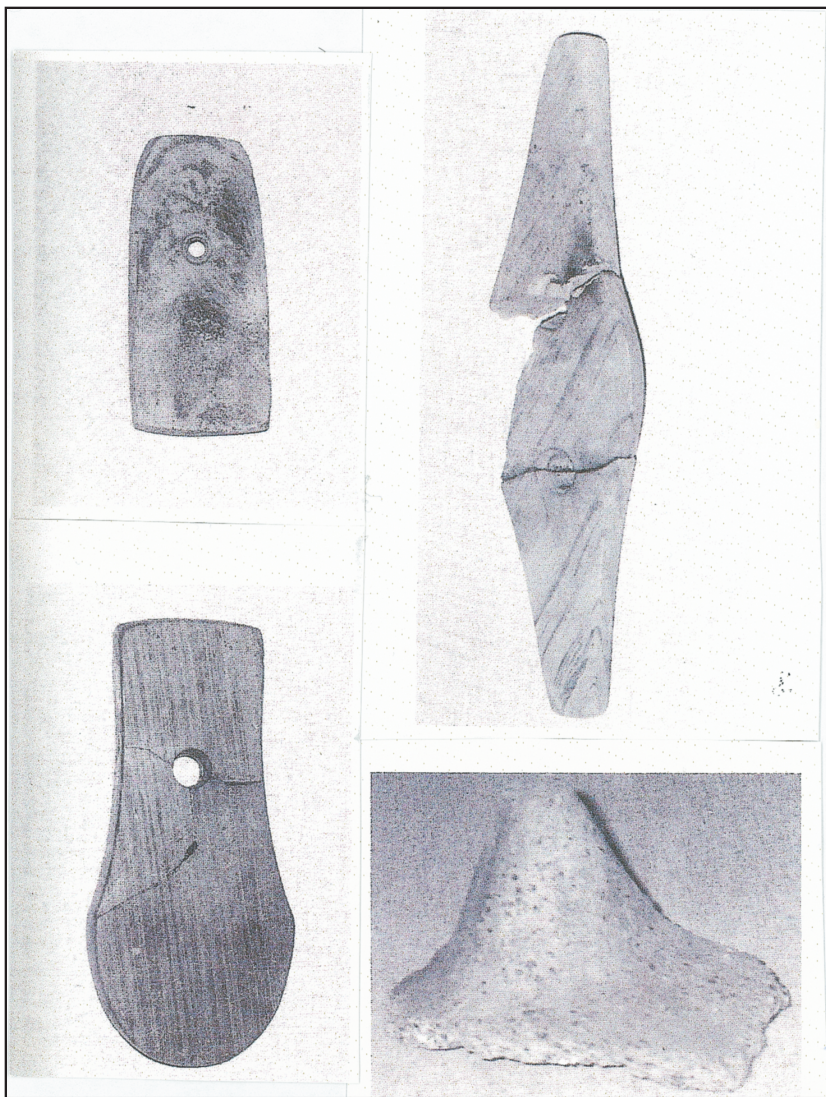


Figure 2 (Gehlbach) Adena artifacts found in the nearby Phillips Mounds. Upper left; Rectangular pendant, banded slate. Upper right; Expanded center gorget, banded slate. Lower left; Keyhole pendant, banded slate. Lower right; Dominion thick type pottery lug.

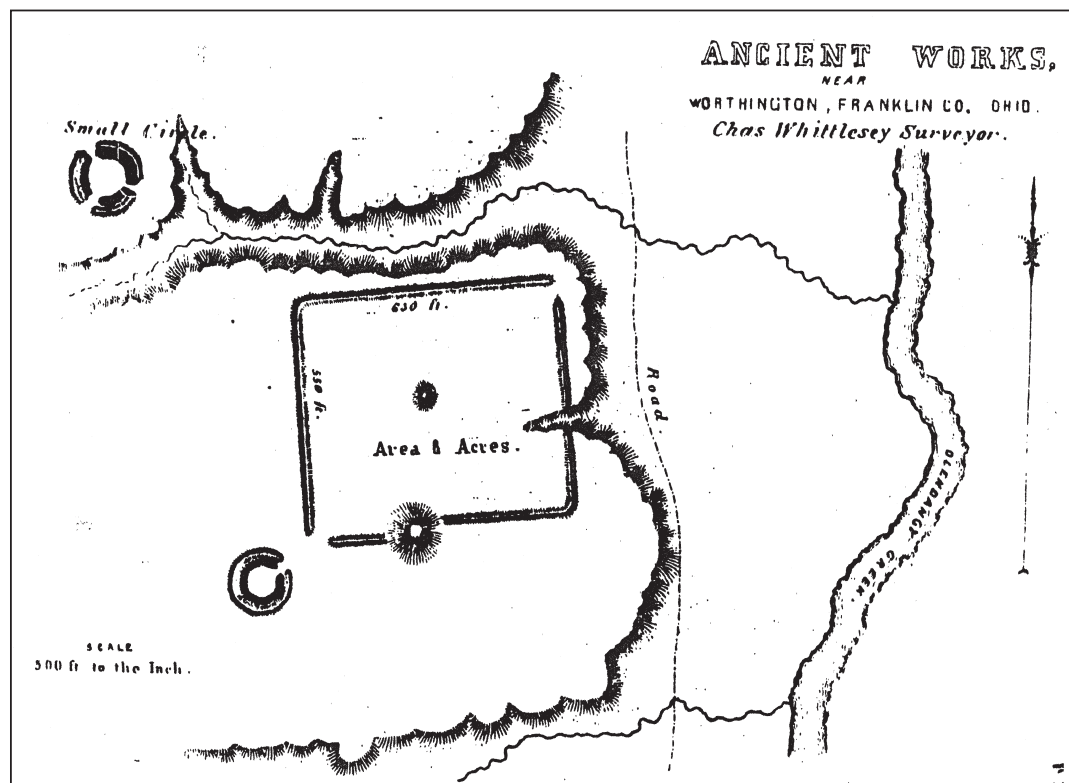


Figure 3 (Gehlbach) Charles Whittlesey 1825 survey diagram of the "Ancient Works near Worthington, Franklin County, Ohio"



Figure 4 (Gehlbach) 1899 photo of the flat topped Jeffers Mound.



Figure 5 (Gehlbach) Current winter view of the Jeffers Mound.